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SUBJECT: NAIROBI EAC CONVENED TO DISCUSS AL-SHABAAB IN KENYA

Classified By: RSO Jeffrey M. Roberts for Reason 1.4 a,b,c,d,e,f,g

11. (SBU) Summary: Embassy Nairobi's Acting Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) convened Post's Core Emergency Action Committee (EAC) on 19 November 2008 to discuss recent events in El Wak, Kenya and recent reports of alleged al-Shabaab activity in country and their impact, if any, on Post operations, facilities, and/or personnel, as well as on private American Citizens working/residing in Kenya. The EAC agreed that the Travel Warning for Kenya remains adequate and does not believe a warning or Warden Message is needed at this time. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On 19 November 2008, Acting DCM convened a meeting of Embassy Nairobi's Core EAC, to include the Regional Security Office (RSO), Regional Affairs Office (RA), Defense Attach Office (DAO), Somalia Section, Kenya US Liaison Office (KUSLO), FBI Legal Attach (LegAtt), Consular Section (Cons), and Political Office to discuss recent events in El Wak, Kenya and recent reports of alleged al-Shabaab activity in Kenya.

El Wak Attacks

13. (SBU) The EAC reviewed known information regarding the attack in El Wak discussed in RefTel A wherein clan affiliated militia members stole Government of Kenya (GoK) vehicles, went door to door in a hotel stealing from patrons, and then kidnapped two Italian nuns. While certain reports state the group was al-Shabaab, evidence of this affiliation is currently lacking.

14. (S/NF) DRSO advised that during a meeting with the Commandant of the Kenya Police Service/Anti-Terrorist Police Unit (KPS/ATPU), the Commandant stated the person arrested in El Wak in association with this attack continues to change his story. While at one time he claims affiliation with the Somalia-based extremist group al-Shabaab, he subsequently retracts under continued debriefing and continues this cycle of denial/affirmation. While the Commandant and Kenyan security services can not completely discount a loose affiliation with al-Shabaab, proper ranking officials within the Kenyan police services theorize, and EAC currently concurs, that the name al-Shabaab is being invoked (hijacked) by advantageous thugs committing financially lucrative criminal acts to either lay blame on a larger entity, instill fear, or both. Regardless, Kenyan security services are monitoring known al-Shabaab supporters in country and are certainly heightening their sensitivity to this group.

15. (SBU) The Somalia Unit advised that their contacts have also warned that criminal and other nefarious acts being committed by separate and varied groups of clan militias and thugs using the name al-Shabaab for the aforementioned reasons.

Al-Shabaab in Kenya

16. (S/NF) GRPO stated that while they continue to receive

reports regarding al-Shabaab's intent on conducting alleged attacks in Ethiopia, no such credible information has recently emerged regarding their intent for Kenya. Regardless, GRPO continues to monitor known al-Shabaab supporters in conjunction with liaison services. DRSO advised that the Kenyan security services appear to be increasingly focused on al-Shabaab and their alleged interest in attacking targets in Kenya, which may result in their conducting additional operations on the border and, in particular, the North Eastern Province, as well as closer monitoring of the Somali-strong Nairobi neighborhood of Eastleigh.

Consular

¶7. (SBU) Consular Counselor advised that the recently released Travel Warning for Kenya clearly warns citizens of the risk of traveling in the North Eastern Province of Kenya in relation to ongoing inter-clan violence and the kidnapping of the Italian nuns. Furthermore, the Kenya Travel Warning also continues to clearly warn traveling Americans of the possible dangers of multiple threats, to include attacks on tourist locales and kidnappings.

Security Posture

¶8. (S/NF) The EAC recognizes the abilities and influence of al-Shabaab; specifically, the limited number of al-Shabaab personnel who are linked to and supportive of East Africa al-Qa'ida. The EAC firmly believes that well-known extremists and myriad armed elements in southern Somalia - to include advantageous criminals and clan militias claiming membership to al-Shabaab - will continue to plan against/attack soft targets in Somalia and that International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) will remain viable target options. RSO and GRPO continue to track, investigate, and analyze all information related to the well-coordinated and executed late October VBIED attacks in northern Somalia that were likely conducted by extremists who are linked to a limited number of East Africa al-Qa'ida members in Somalia. That being said, the core EAC still questions al-Shabaab's (especially advantageous clan based militias who are not hardcore believers in al-Qa'ida's jihadist ideology, yet claim membership to al-Shabaab) overall ability to conduct well-planned, high profile mass casualty attacks (i.e. large scale suicide operations or VBEID attacks) deep in Kenyan territory. RSO and GRPO remain engaged with their Kenyan counterparts in addressing possible al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda personnel, support, and planning in Kenya.

¶9. (SBU) Post's security posture remains high, as it continues to be rated Critical for both Terrorism and Crime.

¶10. (SBU) Points of Contact for this matter is RSO Jeffrey C. Breed and DRSO Jeffrey M. Roberts.
Regards.

RANNEBERGER